



The long take: art cinema and the wondrous

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a few iconic images of that time could be given a more thoughtful attention and analysis.

Space exploration is continuously an aspect of high political and cultural relevance, where the aesthetics of depicting space remain a luring but underexplored domain in social sciences. Therefore, the book, despite some of its visual analytical shortcomings, is an important visual-historical study of the representation of space in the Soviet Union, and significant in its attempt to decipher political messages of conquering nature with science and technology tools, designed and operated by Soviet citizens.

Overall, *Picturing the Cosmos* provides a useful introduction to understanding the media representations of space exploration in the Soviet Union and is an important staging-post on the route for understanding the highly relevant topic of 'out of sight' experiences entering the material world and every day life of common citizens. The book is an easy read and visual-historical approach allows for some fascinating insights, which would have benefited even more with more attention to methodological reflections for further researchers of this important aspect of human endeavour. The book is written principally for aspiring students and scholars in studies of visual history and post-communist studies, and to a lesser degree would satisfy a scholar with an interest in nuances of visual methods and visual culture analysis.

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The long take: Art cinema and the wondrous

by Lutz Koepnick

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, 288 pages

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Reviewed by Pedro Branco, University of Brasília

Apart from a collection of essays recently edited by Gibbs and Pye (2017), Lutz Koepnick's *The Long Take* figures as the only long-format publication specifically dedicated to

the homonymous stylistic device. The book begins by contextualising the long take historically and theoretically, and goes on to develop its arguments in the course of six more chapters, in which the long take is critically considered in several case studies of classic and contemporary works stemming from cinema and visual arts – ranging from Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* to Abbas Kiarostami's *Like Someone in Love*, including video installations such as Sophie Calle's *Voir la Mer*.

The author's core argument is that 'contemporary moving image practice often embraces long takes [...] as a medium to reconstruct spaces for the possibility of wonder' (Koepnick 2017, 1). Koepnick defines wonder as 'the experience of something that defies expectation but need not be encountered with fear, restless action, or speechless defensiveness' (1–2), which the long take renders accessible by slowing down the process of perception to disrupt anticipation and, therefore, suspend the spectator's appetite for immediate narrative meaning-making. The long take is constituted not in absolute terms, but in the extent to which its duration overbears subjective thresholds of sustained attention. Building upon the filmic material's profusion of temporalities and rhythms – and not on the fulfilment of narrative imperatives, the long take inspires the relinquishment of one's urge to act, react and interpret in favour of an entirely different attentional economy, one of reflexive engagement with extraordinary experiences that resist reduction into pre-existing categories. The wondrous elicits curiosity and eagerness to know. It 'enables and allows us to entertain reciprocal relationships between perception and thought, fascination and knowledge' (152), inviting a disposition of freshness and openness to discovery in the face of novelty that restores the possibility of amazement to the world and, ultimately, to the act of seeing itself.

In fact, the author argues, 'wonder's principal force is to retune the very relation between world and perceiving self' (26–27). In this spirit, its emergence is examined in relation to conditions of viewership to derive the features that make up what he calls the *wondrous spectator*, 'a viewer probing the durational as an aesthetic laboratory to reconstruct our sense for experiencing things at first sight' (22). Drawing similarities and establishing differences between five concepts of viewership – contemplative, reverie, absorption, pensive and possessive – Koepnick pinpoints a spectator who, while seeking to preserve the integrities of subject and object, embraces a temporary renouncing of wilfulness to 'take aesthetic pleasure in delay, drift, and suspension' (25). While

their imagination rejects disengaged wandering, their gaze ventures towards the borders of representational frames, foregrounding their authoritativeness and inviting an investigation on the ambiguous status of these screens and screenscapes – at once transparent and opaque – that empower as much as obstruct our capacity to probe into these worlds.

Just as films demand to be understood in their contexts of reception, the study of viewership must factor into its analysis the effects of the environment within which it occurs. The ontological premise according to which films offer a frictionless window into their depicted worlds gravitates around its power to reconcile privileged optical access and safeguarded distance, emphasising ‘the ocular, transitive, and disembodied nature of the viewer’s relation to the screen’ (85). But ‘no screen exists in a vacuum’, he writes, ‘independent of spatial and architectural arrangements shaping how users may relate to their images in the first place’ (54). Thus, the formerly presumed static, all-mindful viewer must give way to one with a body, a position in space and unsteady volition, cognizant of their ‘mental and physical presence in front of an individual screen, or in the midst of an entire landscape of screens’ (24). These, then, become devices that, endowed with materiality, belong to broader spatial systems that modulate ‘what images may do us today and what we may do to images in return’ (59).

Still, not all long takes are created equal: betraying the promise of amazement, they may be used to summon what Koepnick calls antiwonder. If the possibility of wonder is dependant on the experience of durational time, it is because it reclaims a conception of the durational that surpasses the mechanical documentation of time flow to enact a space for viewers to let their guards down and investigate ‘durational receptivity as a precondition for establishing fresh and caring relations to the world’ (157). In the antiwondrous long take, any possibility of newness is deliberately exhausted by crowding out the playful and the unintentional. These call upon spectators to ‘select, guide, readjust, arrest, or track in real time’ (225), thusly reinforcing a logic of hypervigilance and ceaseless, goal-oriented action.

Koepnick’s book imparts a particularly valuable contribution to the work of social science scholars who endeavour to conduct image-based research – of whom is demanded careful consideration of the epistemological implications of technical and stylistic decisions embedded in their use of the camera. How the unfolding of an event

is framed, and for how long, yields not only practical consequences regarding the satisfactoriness of its documentation: it imbues the resulting footage with a set of formal characteristics that implicitly conveys a particular theory of knowledge (MacDougall 1982), thus making it more or less adequate to articulate specific analytical insights. From preserving the integrity of recorded action (Henley 2004) to underscoring the situatedness of fieldwork (MacDougall 1982), the predilection for long takes in ethnographic filmmaking has, more or less consistently, respected and sought to mimic commonly held assumptions about the methodological nature and concerns of anthropological inquiry. What *The Long Take* enables is a shift of focus towards reception and effect. It lends itself to enriching research-focused filmmaking praxis by pointing to a treatment of the long take capable of enacting the commonest ambition across the social sciences: disrupting the ‘taking at face value’ of the observable, not by enforcing coercive exposition upon it, but by allowing it to engage audiences through long exposure.

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Adjusting the lens: Community and collaborative video in Mexico

edited by Freya Schiwy and Byrt Rammack Weber, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017, 272 pages

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During the past decades, anthropologists, media and visual art academics have increasingly been engaging with community and collaborative video making. Scholarly productions have been guided predominantly by key edited volumes on ‘indigenous